LIKF TEARING UP CLOTH

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LIKE TEARING UP CLOTH

Gaëtane Lamarche-Vadel July 30th, 2012

Translation : Suzanne Rankin Isn't the phrase chosen by the artist to represent her exhibition just a bit curious? An incomplete sentence which is a soft metaphor relating the second, figurative meaning leaves out the first meaning which should carry the comparison. The balance is off. Will the lost element come to light during a visit of the exhibition and show us what's missing? The answer is no. Nothing lacks. The metaphor stands on its own, and is whole. We must but look and listen: appreciate the sound of tearing – its inner and outer resonance, the irreparable act, the directness of the words, the forward but elliptical use of like which allows us to choose from many possible paths of meaning.

Much like the ripping of cloth, this incomplete sentence taken from the pages of Jacques Dupin, tells us nothing. It marks the start of a series of works which, though they are nothing alike, share the same sense of schism, of division, of sampling and of autonomy. Set up in the Maison Zervos, these works, which are mostly videos and some photos, are not more talkative than the title. They show instants and fragments of reality from which the artist has subtracted time and place - units that are fundamental to the occidental method of representation. Without the spatial and temporal markers, the images are reduced to an event free from explanation. The hammer, the knife, the cows, the runner, the rock, the acrobat... Though these figures appear without explanation, they leave each room of the house with a simple, efficient, insistent presence (enhanced by the repetition and conciseness of the work), while the occasional rhythmic sound effects of dripping water or hammering keep time. The trivial nature of the recorded sounds, bodies and everyday objects denies any desire for aesthetic refinement. There is no staging, only close framing of a parcel of the human body or of a rock wall. Furthermore, the artist seeks her models not in the precociousness of codified spheres, but in the everyday world.

In La Goulotte, where Annelise Ragno lived, she went in search of images only in the surrounding rural area of the Zevros foundation. This doesn't seem obvious considering the varied subject matter: agriculture, farming, domestics, sport, geology, work, and aeronautics. However, this differentiation of contexts isn't obvious. The viewer identifies primarily the black and the white, or the sky and the desert which end up isolating the images. They seem to come from nowhere – or perhaps just from the eye of the artist which cuts them out even before the intervention of the editor's scalpel.

Cut-outs and fragmentation are reoccurring devices in the artist's work, and here they are put to use in the form of a pantomime played out by two ageless kitchen knives who dance and tease each other, give in to "un art de la pointe" ¹⁻² and experienced dodging. We will see in Les cavaliers (Dance partners) allusions to mock fighting, lovers' games or even spiritual jousting without resolution. This video echoes Saut (Jump) an older piece which shows more closely, with more sensuality and less sarcasm two men who are hanging in the air by an elastic and who – through a trick of image reversal – give the illusion of a meeting of two bodies clinging to one another. Here the framing has but one

1. In reference to the treaty of Baltazar Gracian, Agudezza e arte del ingenio, 1648, La pointe ou l'art du génie translated by Benito Pelegrin, Seuil, 1983

2. In reference to Roland Barthes, Le bruissement de la langue in Essais IV, Seuil, 1984 goal, to emphasize the swinging movement of the bodies as they sail across the blue screen. The shoot separates the bodies from the technical aspects which would tie them back into the realm of entertainment and thrill. These airborne bodies, engrossed by their embrace, swing through the sky as lightly as the angels of Jean Genet – though the two artists have little in common except perhaps the double movement of combat and innocence or darkness and light.



Newer works like Les cavaliers (Dance Partners), resulting from the "terroir" of the Yonne region, have much more in common with the slowness and heaviness of rural life, the stillness of the landscapes, the story of time inscribed in the layers of the earth and the slow creation of sedimentary stones.



Still life – 2012

I would gladly establish a connection between the fragmented images of cattle and sheep in the stables and those, defined by the spotlight, of the walls of Arcy-sur-Cure. Still Life, which was filmed in the half-light of the stable and the sheepfold, shows a succession of shots consisting of the freshly shaven bovine or ovine coats, combined with head profile shots which are divided up as well. Though there is no respect of anatomical form, the way in which the camera divides up the shots brings to mind the butcher's diagram that is cast upon the form of a cow to divide its body into edible parts. Here, however, the fragmentation of the body isn't done in order to single out the finest parts, but to create



a distance with the animal as we know it. At the same time, we see from close up the intimate detail of the top of the head, the nostrils, the belly, and the eyes - all details that we can imagine as belonging to the "rustle" of the animal's existence. The organic body disappears as a new and exclusively aesthetic geography is invented; the image doesn't go any deeper than what is immediately visible and the tangible nature of the folds, the spots, a quiver, a breath, the moistness of a nostril, the smoothness of the coat, or the fixity of an eye. This is not an anatomical voyage, but a series of living tableaux or barogue, surrealist-style still life images – both photography and video – that hold our attention. The exposure is long, and the longer it is, the more intense the sense of discovery of infinite details that draws us away from the organ and towards the richness of matter and light. Thus, a drawn out close-up of a cow's eye allows for a dive into the aqueous humour and the greyish rings of the iris around the dilated black pupil which reveals large white viscous sclerotic areas which are injected with blood from the corner of the eye. Additionally, once we have crossed all the transparent and watery layers of the eye we are able to see the windows of the stable that are, undoubtedly, reflected within. The close-ups that were taken of the corner of the eye, the chest, the dewlap, and the flank all lead to one thing: a collection of infinitesimal sensations offered up for contemplation. What comes to mind is a video performance by Bruce Nauman³ who, in auto-filming, records over the space of an hour the slow change in skin colour – pink turns to green, to livid, to red - from the light but continual pressure of his finger poking his eye. These repetitive and coercive exercises inflicted on the body in the aim of distorting certain zones are absent from Annelise Ragno's work, though her pieces sometimes come close to depicting something similar. Here, the images that she presents show no trace of abuse. However, though a great sense of tranquility emanates from the images, our empathy with the placidity of the animals is not exempted from a vague feeling of malaise brought on by the numbers stapled to the ears of the animals, and our knowledge – along with their ignorance – of what the future holds.

3. Bruce Nauman, Poke in the eye /nose /ear 3/8/1994, Edit



As the harvest of exploratory travels, the works have a dimension that is documentary – but how ? Though the choice of the images is provoked by what the artist sees, learns and discovers, there is no pre-conceived project and the investigation lacks scientific and journalistic protocol. In the end the decision is made neither by the wealth nor the scarcity nor the didactic value of the information, but by what resists the onslaught of time while wearing its scars, evokes the solitude that comes from plenitude, and by what bears witness to the sedimentation, crystallization, and persistence of both physical and psychological living matter. The categories used can be ethical and aesthetic, ranging from human to geological subject matter. The ability of a piece to fit into two diverse genres is a determining factor in its selection for the exhibition.



A mountain – 2012

Inlassablement (Tirelessly), the video of the runner, is an example of this choice. Photographs, though fairly rare in Annelise Ragno's work, and their titles also result from this dual identity. A forest as well as A mountain are taken from the caves of Arcy lit up by a flashlight. The deposits that hang from the ceiling of the cave and the calcium deposits that run down the walls create a forest plateau or a rocky archipelago – emerging in the night, they are more fiction or dreamlike projection than reality. The loss of scale strongly adds to the ambiguity that ties in with the phantasmagorias experienced in caves. The regular dripping of water gives a sense of the size of the cavern. In 'Soliloque' (Soliloquy) we don't see the cave that we hear and that resonates. On the contrary, what we see is an image of calcium deposits forming on a chocolate coloured rock outcropping – it brings to mind culinary imagery of icing on a cake rather than a geological phenomenon.



When image and sound are disconnected, and the spread between what we see and what we hear is widened and worked in diverging directions, the effect is that each tangible layer of reality is intensified. The spectator is free to establish connections between the visuals and the sound effects. What is basically a classic procedure becomes more complicated and subtle in another video: Ébauche du vertige (A hint of vertigo). A miniscule silhouette in a flight suit is executing an incomprehensible series of movements on an abandoned tarmac - it corresponds to a similar dissociation. Here there is no sound, but there is a distance between the striking, repeated - almost codified - movements of the unknown figure and the immensity of the arid plateau where he is moving about. The two clearly belong to different scales, they have different stories to tell, and their spatial and mental norms aren't alike. We won't find out that in fact we are observing an acrobat miming the aerobatics of his airplane on a landing strip of the Burgundy Airport. But when we summarize the facts in such a banal manner, the gaps are smoothed over. It says nothing of the (romantic?) dereliction of this human placed in the middle of nowhere, or of the hieratic shapes drawn in space that are so infinitely far from us that no link will ever bring them closer to our understanding and that – au contraire – will become even more radical when the pilot exits the camera's field of vision and leaves us before an empty screen. And when he returns, we will understand that this incongruous figure, concentrated on an eccentric gesture, is drawing figures that link earth and sky in a ritual that is as modern as it is timeless.

THE INVENTION OF PERPETUAL MOTION

Jacques Py July 16th, 2012

Translation : Suzanne Rankin

"A minute slipped away in glances of amazement" Gustave Flaubert, Bouvard et Pécuchet

1. Robert Doisneau, Trois secondes d'éternité, Paris, Éditions Contrejour, 1979 Trois secondes d'éternité (Three seconds of eternity) is the title of one of Robert Doisneau's works¹ in which he added up all the exposure times of the photographs reproduced in the book. Seizing time and preserving a state within the image has been the primary preoccupation of photographers, but over the last 50 years, video has become part of the process. Annelise Ragno's work is guided by these two aspirations: finding the image that condenses action and the transcribing of the vitality that leads to motion. She strives to stop time without lessening the energy that animates facial expressions, gestures and movements. In order to meet this particular challenge, the artist struggles against the fleetingness of a scene and the inertia of fixed images by dwelling on a sequence, reactivating a moment in time or the juxtaposition of screens.

From the framing of shots to their reproduction, Annelise Ragno relies on diverse screen types and projection methods to transpose her work. The video takes shape in a dedicated space that will allow it to take its definitive form. With the surface of a wall, the size of an image and its proportions, projection modules, or a flat screen, a particular relationship is established with the rectangular image destined to be revealed in the architecture of the show space. Most often, the intention is to break with the standard, head-on format of a cinematographic film. Annelise Ragno has recognised that a history of video cannot be completed without putting into perspective the question of how an image and its contents are affected by the space in which the images are projected as well as the means of projection.



Her initial work focussed on the human machine subjected to the particular needs of sport which imposes unusual attitudes and tensions. This was the original source for a series of videos. Carefully chosen framing and a lack of surroundings separate the athlete from the context, the equipment and the terrain of the sport in question. The image reveals an unusual pose on a neutral background, hitherto abstract and enigmatic to the viewer. In silence of the screening room, the video plays on, and the origin of the soundless scene is suddenly brought to light by a title that appears on screen. At times an intent face, submitted to a rhythmic, frenetic swaying, strikes the frame of the image like an animal throws itself at the side of its cage. Annelise Ragno masters caesura in framing thanks to her narrow static shots that separate her subjects from their environment and create a space of representation totally devoid of context. Close in nature to photographic vision, her video camera never moves, remaining stationary in the face of unfolding events.



The farandole is a traditional dance move that is transposed into the language of video as a continuous loop that can provoke a hypnotic fascination for the spectator through the iteration of a basic figure. Over and over, an oar propelled by the muscular strength of a rower flashes across the screen². The perpetually recurring action wants to move the skiff forward, but remains entirely useless in its quest. The mechanics of the movements seem to get tangled up and exhaustingly go nowhere, all the while giving the spectator the sense that the process is endless, much like a strip of images brought to life by a praxinoscope. With this reference to the pre-history of cinema, the artist's videography seems to want to use as building blocks the forgotten language of photography that was definitively abandoned once film made its appearance.

Cheval d'arçon (Pummel horse): the juxtaposition of the pendular movements of a gymnast creates such a swaying movement that we can't help but wonder if he is producing it on his own³. The repetition of the rotation of his legs generates an undulation that goes from screen to screen, making us doubt the athlete's unique ability to lift off from his apparatus with the sheer force of his arms and the energy that incites his lower body. The piece doesn't provide a start or an end. The series of screens replay the sequence endlessly, and the spectator is left with only the expectation of a dénouement.

In its time, Miss Lala at the cirque Fernando, by Degas⁴, laid bare the tricks of a profane version of the ascension to heaven. Harnessed and interdependent, intoxicated by the emptiness around them, the swirling bodies of the two men provide us with an impression of a celestial merry-go-round like a funeral waltz⁵. Filmed

2. Aviron (Oar) – 2006, video projection, 2s in a loop, General Council of Seine-Saint-Denis collection

3. Cheval d'arçon (Pummel horse) – 2006, video diptych 30s in a loop General Council of Seine-Saint-Denis collection

4. Edgar Degas, Miss Lala at the cirque Fernando, 1879, oil on canvas, Tate Gallery, London.

5. Saut (Jump) – 2006, video projection, 8s in a loop, Frac Haute-Normandie collection. with the subjects hanging from the end of the elastic that saved them from the fatal result of their fall, the original hanging image is inverted and becomes an elevation with nothing but sky in the background. Carried away by the inexpressible grace of those freed from gravity, the subjects are vaguely reminiscent of the angels in the work of Tiepolo. However, one of the dangling bodies, powerless and inert, strapped and supported by his acolyte, vacillates between begging for mercy and the ascension to Paradise – chosen as one of God's martyrs.



The process of inverting images can be found in other works by the artist, namely in Chauve souris (Bat) which is projected at the topmost part of the wall⁶. A row of men and women, naked from the waist up, seem to hang upside-down from the ceiling. One after the other, they sit up to create a rippling effect that animates this strange tableau of hybrid mammals. In another video, the body of an athlete is put through stretching exercises which, when turned upside down, reveal the stunning grace of an animal.

As a means to counterbalance the body's subjection to gravity, Annelise Ragno uses her videos to extract the choreographic aspect of the human form from its physical workings by freeing it from the Earth's pull. The sub-surface figures of her works – farandole, waltz, round dance – reveal this aspiration. Paradoxically, a complex sequence composed of a buoyant ballet is projected on the ground – confirmation of the duality of being submitted to the laws of gravity and of the desire to escape them.

In Ébauche du vertige (A hint of vertigo), at the centre of a panoramic image, a man prepares to act out a strange and somewhat jerky pantomime⁷. Wearing a pilot's uniform as a costume, the dancer carries out a choreography composed of twists and turns, gestural arabesques, and abrupt head movements within a context of apparent calm and control over each position. Thoroughly absorbed by the memorisation of the series of timed attitudes that are seemingly the object of such intent concentration, the man unveils his aeronautic intentions. Arms like wings, hands like rudders and flaps, and his body the fuselage, he is the grounded version of the machinery whose acrobatic flight he mimics. Gertrude Stein wrote "A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose..." until the image of the object was erased and the perception became that of a simple abstraction of words. Here, it is the untiring repetition of gestures that is being put into guestion, and automatism takes precedence over thought like a rerun that works towards the obliteration of physical consciousness. Wouldn't vertigo be a result of this loss?

6. Chauve souris (Bat) – 2007, detail, video diptych, 52s in a loop

7. Ébauche du vertige (A hint of vertigo) – 2012, video projection, 2min 8s in a loop 8. René Magritte, La Trahison des images (The Treachery of Images) 1929, oil on canvas, Los Angeles County Museum of Art

9. Cloud – 2012, colour photograph, 53x80cm

René Magritte wouldn't have disowned Annelise Ragno's version of The Treachery of Images⁸ – a photograph of a nail driven into a cloud⁹. But is it enough to say this is not a cloud to legitimise this piece in the artistic world and to place it under the authority of such a reference? Beyond appearances and the surface analysis of the work, the image strikes us with its complex polysemy, as ideas presented in obvious simplicity often do. The nail is evidently one of the subjects of the piece as we can see by its inclusion in the title, but also because it literally points at the cumulous and fixes it to the wall as though it were a sign. The cloud is hung from the nail in a way that makes us see it as being somewhat the star of the piece. In this way, the cloud resurfaces to give itself an image. The reflection of a mirror gives away the subterfuge of the shot, and the addition of a "D" to the title also does away with subconscious randomness. The author uses a French-English play on words with CLOU(D), probably with the intention of revealing the devices of an image that conjugates an number of opposites: hard metal and diaphanous clouds, the fixed or elusive nature of things, and again the marriage of the earthly and heavenly in her work.





Annelise Ragno is constantly moving her artistic quest along the borderline of photography and video, between immobility and movement. With the nail, she points out the ongoing dilemma of her project: drawing out the fleeting into something that lasts over time. The majority of her work can illustrate the search for perpetual motion, or a way to grasp eternity in an image repeated over and over again as if to escape from a feeling of completion. Like an Écho (Echo) ¹⁰ of the previously mentioned photograph, this video of a roofer refers once again to the rupture between the earth-bound and the heavenly: The roof of the house that he is working on which isn't visible on screen. The tradesman repeatedly strikes a blow whose sound isn't synchronised with the image, as though two metronomic rhythms are trying to find each other in order to become one single beat.

Alone in the countryside around Vézelay, he runs. His face is emotionless, expressionless – he is far from the end of the race. The yellow scenery of canola fields slides by in the background. Framed from the midriff up, we don't know who he is or where he is going. Inlassablement (Tirelessly) ¹¹, the sequence that keeps him company lacks a beginning or an end because its goal is endurance and thus to show duration. Enclosed between the two borders of the screen, the old man is a marathon runner and he is the only one who knows how far he has left to run.

Soliloque (Soliloquy): since what immemorial era has this drop been dripping onto the cup that it will end up covering with the calcium sediment it contains¹²? In the grottoes of Arcy-sur-Cure, which were favoured by André Leroi-Gourhan, Annelise Ragno confronts other scales of space and time – those of geological time which erodes or shapes the most inalterable minerals with each drop that escapes from the ceiling. This water clock and its chronometrically perfect timing excludes us from the implacable hammering of its astronomical countdown. In these grottoes, there is a parallel game of space and perspective. Photography turns the subtle undulations of a vault covered with spurs into

10. Écho (Echo) – 2012, video on screen, 17s in a loop

11. Inlassablement (Tirelessly) – 2012, video on screen, 4min 51s in a loop

12. Soliloque (Solioquy) – 2012, video on screen, 17s in a loop a mountainous landscape covered with conifers. These images are once again the result of the magic of spatial reversals - the notorious archetype of the camera obscura, the cavern. The generic titles, Une montagne, Une forêt (A mountain, A forest) ¹³ reinforce the idea. In addition to the carved and painted representations, grottoes are useful to the artist as the place where all the visions captured in the outdoors, which is the source of all her images, are turned upside-down.



Though the piece is called Still Life ¹⁴, the dawning ambience is heavy with the torpor that has overtaken the farm animals. The outward passivity of the animals is contained by fear and we know that a sudden movement would certainly cause panic. Does this lamb, like that depicted by Zubaran, sense the sacrifice he will make? In the Caravaggio-like half-darkness of the stable, the flies are drawn to the moistness of the cows' eyes and there they remain. Flesh shuddering beneath the hair and the head of an ox focus the worried breathing of the entire body. The animal is no more than a moving eye – a mirror eye – shining with residual light. Facing the glass lens of the video camera, he reaches out to the audience with his look, seizing us with his own terror. The two knife blades whirling in the sky ¹⁵ like a constant threat of an internecine struggle are of no use in reassuring man or beast.



As a grand finale, and with a last double entendre, Annelise Ragno invites the audience to decipher a word that is raised and written backwards on a blank sheet ¹⁶. It consists in reading "BATAILLE" which, by the decontextualization of the embossed family name on the gravestone of the writer in Vézelay, leads us to think of an act of war as much as the person. Like a book placed face up, the gravestone, printing site for Empreinte n°8 (Impression n°8) has thus become the stone imprint of the final combat reduced to a single word – the name of its author.

13. Une montagne (A mountain), Une forêt (A forest) – 2012, colour photographs, 100x66cm

14. Still life – 2012, video projection, 4min 12s in a loop

15. Les cavaliers (Dance partners) – 2012, video projection, 9min 55s in a loop

16. Empreinte n°8 (Impression n°8) – 2012, embossed paper, 50x32cm

NEVER SAY DIE

PRETENDING OR NOT

Gaëtane Lamarche-Vadel September 15th, 2010

Translation : Marie-Thérèse Weal Annelise Ragno's images do not give in to readily recognised sweet beauty, a trap which Barthes feared photography could fall into through artistic sublimation or over-exposure in the media. With Ragno's work, aesthetics renews itself thanks to mechanics. The artist plays anew with the use of the frame, which, ever since the art of painting and that of photography has had a long practice of beheading. The frame cuts, subtracts, decontextualises. The frame is still active in the window, the photographic plate, the photograms, the screen, all of which limit, cut out afresh the painted, the developed or the projected representation. The video artist simultaneously uses the two-fold means of cutting the subject and the movement in order to create images. The dynamics of Ragno's videos is born from photographic mechanics. She selects various body parts in full physical action: a head, a back, a torso, sometimes a sleeve, some details of which (corresponding to fractions of a second) she captures, isolates and mounts into a loop of constantly moving contiguous squares. The line of moving images is not meant to produce nor even evoke the (segmented) continuity of movement (as in Muybridge or Marey). It is meant to produce a succession of apparitions which, because they break up the overall picture and the development of the action, creates rhythmic impressions, mnesic traces of a match or of a sports performance, say. Here, less is more. And that is all the more noticeable when the expressions, concentrated in a few features or folds, appear at intervals and only partially in the sole rectangle of the screen. Because they are detached, the parts become autonomous and can enter into a-meaning (a-signifiant) compositions, to put it like Guattari, and are on the verge of becoming senseless, as it has been said of Guéricault's anatomical pieces. But, actually, they do not, because fragmenting is not breaking up nor is cutting amputating. Even if the cuts are sharp and the expressiveness is intense, the pieces and their montage make sense.



Never say die – 2010

Annelise Ragno's latest videos abandon fragmentation and are content with capturing movements on the shimmering surface of water. Actually, they concentrate essentially on one event only: a "duration" which generates some kind of eeriness or even danger. One of them is a night vision, the surface of an expanse of water in the grip of vibratory movements. Hundreds of foaming ripples move under the impact of some invisible current, a gust of wind or mysterious hand, then the water goes back to its original stillness. "Beware of still waters" is what comes to mind when watching two young girls in another video. They stare at each other while chasing each other around in a slack sea. The surface of the water split their mouths open, making them speechless. Through close ups or long shots, the image focuses on the stares, which hold each other at bay while at the same time holding each other in check. It also focuses on the dance performed by the arms and the legs of the swimmers who move in a circle. A muted violence pervades the scene in concentric waves around the bodies. Is it a war game or a more harmless one?



"War of nerves, seems to suggest the vibrations – both held and withheld - of the lightly plucked metallic strings. The music, which I have yet to hear, when delivering its version, will probably revive the enigma.^{1"} But in the end, it is the static video of a head held out of water that makes us feel most uneasy and threatened. Two portraits. Two sequence shots of a trout: one from below, one from above. They bear the eloquent name of Never say die². When looked at frontally, the eyes, deprived of all expression, stare into space, the mouth is wide open, the cheeks swell when the gills take in the air, the rhythm of the breathing accelerates. Separated from its liquid environment, the fish suffocates, but this is only the mechanical movement of breathing. Next to it, top up, the video camera focuses on the dorsal part of the gills. The latter open up slightly, the slits widen with each inhaling, the fins stand at 90°, desperate breathing gives way to pathetic convulsive movements. Unlike the other dreamlike videos, these ones address what it is to be a living creature, a state we share with the trout. These silent images are all about breathing and suffocating, life and death. The sexual connotation of the dorsal part losing its water is obvious. But, above all, what we feel is compassion cum fascination for these movements, which are as automatic as they are pointless. This feeling is mixed with the fear that we are playing with it all, because a representation is sometimes a game that is more powerful and cruel than reality. It certainly takes some audacity to dare and show extreme situations; it takes what Artaud called "cruelty": "What I mean by cruelty is appetite for life, cosmic rigour and relentless necessity [...] the kind of pain without the inevitable necessity of which life could not be performed.3"

1. Annelise Ragno, conversation, 2010

2. Never say die – 2010, shifting video installation, 6min 10s in a loop

3. Antonin Artaud, Le théâtre et son double (The theatre and its double), Œuvres complètes, tome IV, Gallimard, 1987, p.97

